

# The Threat of U.S. Societal Collapse by 2040

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Note: This report is based on the author’s student presentation, a 10-minute video prepared for an imagined client: the Executive Branch of the United States Government. This report is edited and expanded from the original presentation. The original video is online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBao4I\\_oNsc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBao4I_oNsc) .

## The Threat of U.S. Societal Collapse by 2040

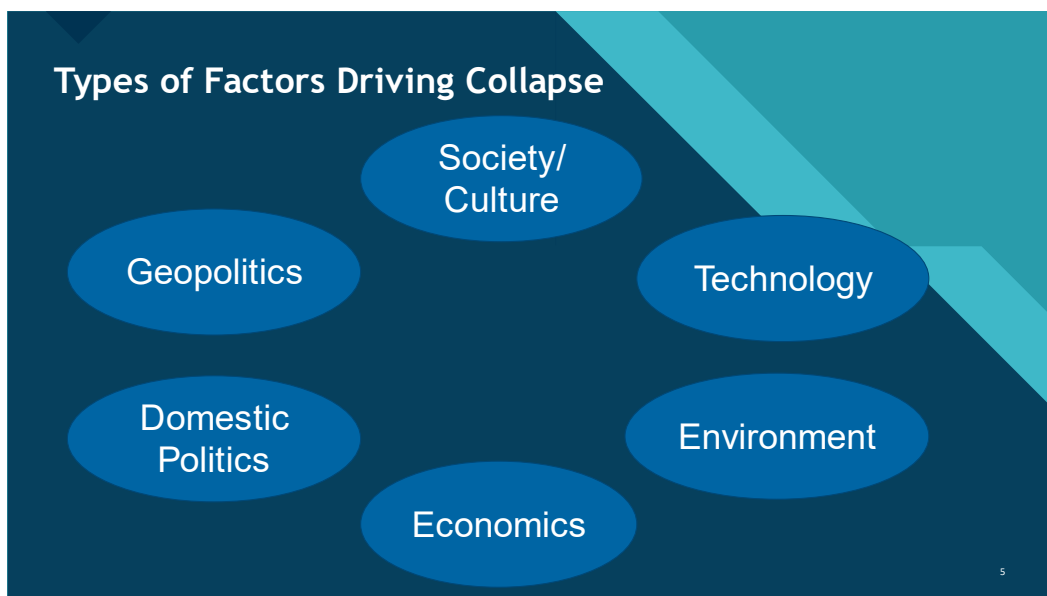
This paper addresses the following questions:

- I. What are the current threats to the endurance of society in the United States?
- II. Could American society actually collapse by 2040? If so, how?
- III. What can the Executive Branch do to ensure the endurance of American society?

To answer these questions, I followed the Framework Foresight approach taught in the University of Houston Foresight Program, including the use of morphological analysis (Part II) and causal layered analysis (Part III).

### Part I: Current Threats to the Endurance of Society in the United States

Societal collapse is a complex phenomenon involving political disintegration, widespread lawlessness, disruption of vital goods and services, and macroeconomic collapse. There are six types of factors that could drive societal collapse in America.



1. **Social and cultural factors**, such as the increase in anti-science sentiment and extreme individualism.

2. **Technological factors**, such as (1) the vulnerabilities of the electrical grid and our supply chains to both extreme weather and cyberwarfare, (2) the vastly increased destructive power



made available to individuals over the last generation, including commercial drones altered to carry firearms, flamethrowers, and bombs, and (3) the potential



## The Genetic Engineering Genie Is Out of the Bottle

The next pandemic could be bioengineered in someone's garage using cheap and widely available technology.

By [Vivek Wadhwa](#), a columnist at Foreign Policy and a fellow at Harvard Law School's Labor and Worklife Program.



for abuse by private individuals of readily available CRISPR and other genetic technology capable of creating gains of function (lethality, infectiousness) in pathological micro-organisms.

3. **Environmental factors**, such as all the impacts of climate change, pollution, and resource depletion.

4. **Economic factors**, such as sectors of the national financial markets that are largely unregulated and highly volatile.



5. **Domestic political factors**, such as the increase in calls by state and national political officials for political violence and a “Second Civil War,” and the increase in pro-authoritarian and pro-fascist rhetoric.

6. **Geopolitical factors**, in particular the territorial ambitions of Russia and China, and their development of hypersonic missiles.



## Part II: How America Could Collapse—Or Endure

There are different possibilities tucked within each of these types of factors.

<b>Different Possibilities for Each Type of Factor</b>					
<b>Society/Culture</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Economics</b>	<b>Domestic Politics</b>	<b>Geopolitics</b>
Anti-Science and Toxic Individualism ethics persist and grow	No increase in tech-savvy domestic terrorism	We keep doing what we've been doing	We continue laissez-faire, <u>offshoring</u> , <i>shareholder</i> capitalism	No Second Civil War; no measures to stop it.	No attacks from China or Russia; no great counter-measures
USG heavily promotes science and “wagon train / barn raising” ethics	Great increase in tech-savvy domestic terrorism	USG takes aggressive approach to energy, climate, pandemics & healthcare	USG heavily promotes highly regulated, <u>onshoring</u> , <i>stakeholder</i> capitalism	Increased political violence incites a Second Civil War	China & Russia together launch a surprise EMP attack.
	USG puts great resources into physical + cyber security			USG vigorously undermines basis for 2nd Civil War	USG aggressively undermines China/Russia milit. + econ.

Different combinations of these possibilities produced three very different scenarios. These are the Business-As-Usual Scenario, the Express Elevator Scenario, and the America Strong Scenario.

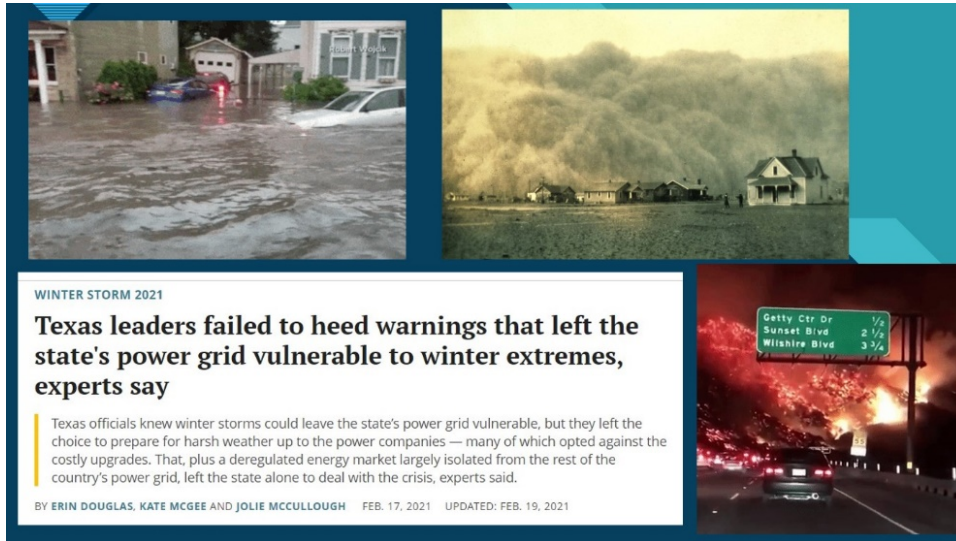
### *The Business-As-Usual Scenario*

<b>Society/Culture</b>	<b>Technology</b>	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Economics</b>	<b>Domestic Politics</b>	<b>Geopolitics</b>	<b>Scenario</b>
Anti-Science and Toxic Individualism ethics persist and grow	No increase in tech-savvy domestic terrorism	We keep doing what we've been doing	We continue laissez-faire, <u>offshoring</u> , <i>shareholder</i> capitalism	No Second Civil War; no measures to stop it.	No attacks from China or Russia; no great counter-measures	<b>Business As Usual</b>

In the Business-As-Usual Scenario, America chugs along, with no major surprises like domestic or geopolitical warfare. However, just because America chooses to carry on with business as usual does not mean that the world will cooperate.

## Environmental Factors

First, if the U.S. continues with what it has been doing, the climate crisis will only



get much worse, threatening the survival of coastal cities, the land's ability to grow food, safety from wildfires, even the stability of electrical grids.

It gets worse. Because the climate crisis fosters the emergence of zoonotic diseases, it is only a matter of time before the U.S. experiences a high-mortality, highly contagious viral pandemic against which the nation cannot develop vaccines or treatments quickly enough.

## Economic Factors

Second, the current situation in the national financial markets is extremely fragile. It is widely recognized that the value of the stock market is divorced from the state of the real economy of jobs and production.



Beyond that, the same financial derivatives behind the financial crisis of 2007-2008 are still traded today, albeit under slightly different names.



In addition, American society now demonstrates rampant speculation in stocks and cryptocurrencies—which creates a recipe for a multi-sided crash of the financial markets.

In sum, the Business-As-Usual Scenario depicts, not survival, but rather a decline tending towards ultimate societal collapse.

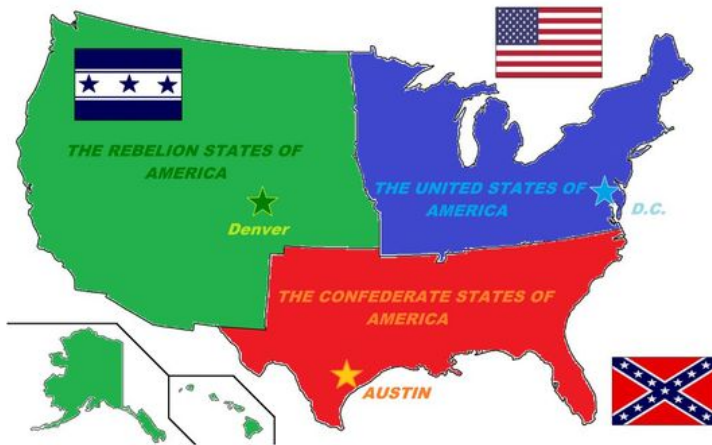
### *The Express Elevator Scenario*

In the Express Elevator Scenario, environmental and economic factors are joined by other factors that make a faster, total collapse more likely.

Society/Culture	Technology	Environment	Economics	Domestic Politics	Geopolitics	Scenario
Anti-Science and Toxic Individualism ethics persist and grow		We keep doing what we've been doing	We continue laissez-faire, offshoring, shareholder capitalism			
	Great increase in tech-savvy domestic terrorism			Increased political violence incites a Second Civil War	China & Russia together launch a surprise EMP attack.	<b>Express Elevator</b>

### Domestic Political & Sociocultural Factors

Calls for political violence from both local and government officials, as well as



some media outlets, become frequent and strong, fomenting a Second Civil War. This results, at least functionally, in dividing the nation into multiple mutually antagonistic districts.

Distrust of science becomes more widespread, impeding efforts to combat future pandemics.



Domestic terrorists launch deadlier drone attacks, causing mass casualties and significant destruction, resulting in national fear and confusion.

[Pictured: Actual drone fireworks mock attack.]



### Geopolitical Factors

Adversary nations, terrorists, and criminals increase the destructive power of their cyberattacks.



In one version of this scenario, Russian and Chinese military cyberwarfare specialists launch simultaneous and

massive cyberattacks to disrupt all manner of civilian and military communications, transportation, and electrical power across the United Nations.

Shortly afterwards, China and Russia seize the opportunity created by this chaos. Their submarines launch hypersonic cruise missiles to detonate electromagnetic pulse (EMP) weapons around the United States.



The EMP weapons disable virtually all civilian electrical equipment and the entire national power grid in a brief moment.

The U.S. population is instantly plunged into the technological equivalent of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century — without the skills to survive in such a world.



Then the Chinese and Russian leadership dictate the terms of America's surrender.



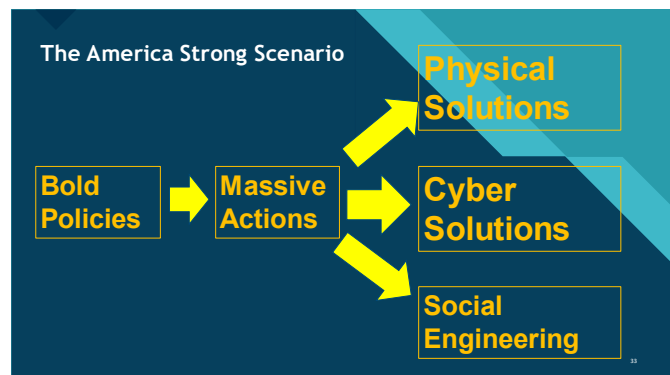
In sum, this scenario is, to put it colloquially, an express elevator to hell: the utter collapse of American society.

However, there is another way.

### The America Strong Scenario

Society/Culture	Technology	Environment	Economics	Domestic Politics	Geopolitics	Scenario
USG heavily promotes science and “wagon train / barn raising” ethics		USG takes aggressive approach to energy, climate, pandemics & healthcare	USG heavily promotes highly regulated, onshoring, stakeholder capitalism			
	USG puts great resources into physical + cyber security			USG vigorously undermines basis for 2nd Civil War	USG aggressively undermines China/Russia milit. + econ	<b>America Strong</b>

In the America Strong Scenario, the United States Government (USG) makes bold policy choices and backs those up with massive efforts to develop physical and cyber solutions, as well as social engineering solutions.



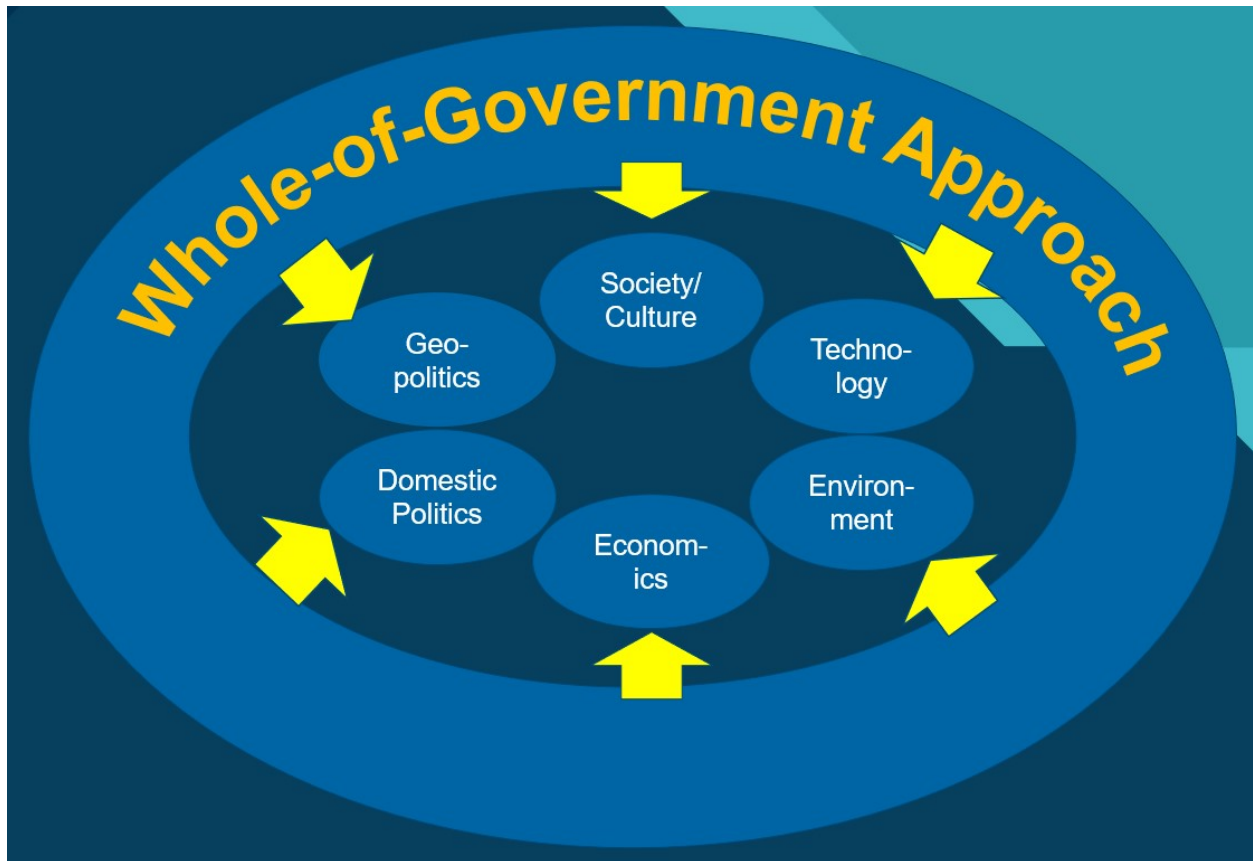
These solutions are applied to address directly the social/cultural, technological, environmental, economic, domestic political, and geopolitical threats to the survival of American society outlined in Part I

above. Because of these actions, Americans thrive, and American society is stable, prosperous, and secure.

In the following and final part of this presentation, I describe what the U.S. Executive Branch can do to actualize the America Strong Scenario.

### Part III: What the U. S. Executive Branch Can Do

To actualize the America Strong Scenario, the Executive Branch of the United States Government (USG) takes a Whole-of-Government (WoG) approach to address the factors that otherwise could drive the collapse of American society.



#### *Actions to Address Technological Factors*

USG takes vigorous steps to improve its cybersecurity, as well as the physical security and robustness of its networks for the distribution of energy and drinking water. This would likely involve a major expansion of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), a functional

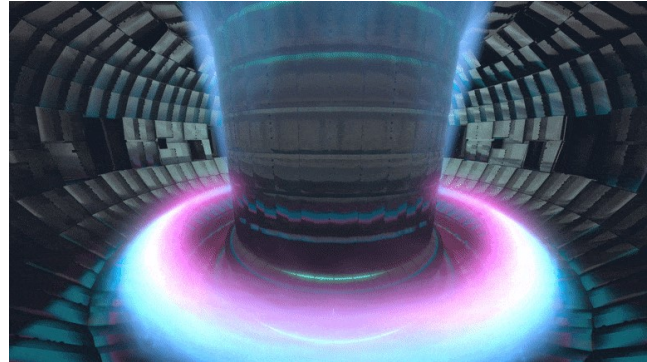


component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), with associated increased budgeting for staff, salaries, recruitment, and operations.

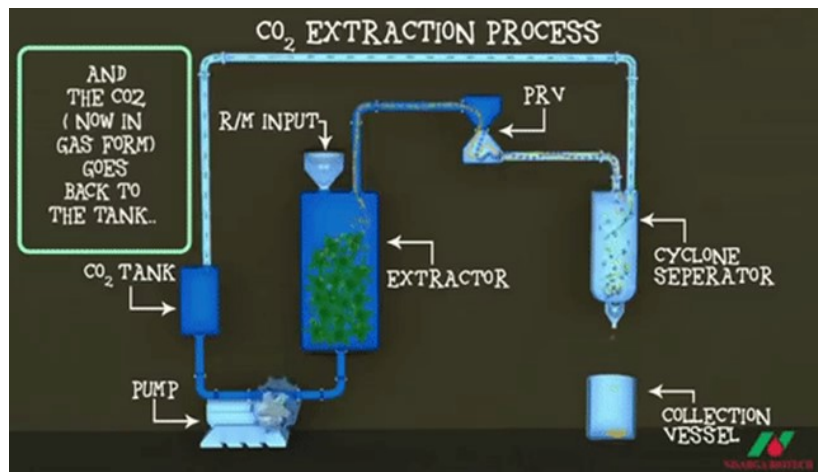
### *Actions to Address Environmental Factors*

In addition to expanding the regulatory powers of the Environmental Protection Agency, USG addresses environmental factors in several ways.

Aside from promoting other renewable energy, USG establishes a New Manhattan Project to develop AI-controlled fusion power to curtail our use of fossil fuels. (Involved: the U.S. Departments of Commerce and Energy.)



USG promotes efforts to actively extract carbon from the atmosphere, to reduce, in part, anthropogenic climate change. (Involved: Departments of the Interior and Commerce.)



USG promotes efforts to relocate coastal populations inland, to protect them from repeated flooding caused by climate change. (Involved: Departments of Commerce and the Interior.)



USG increases healthcare capacity, through hospital construction and renovation, and through full-ride scholarships and other financial incentives for pandemic-relevant medical personnel. (Involved: Departments of Commerce and Education.)



### ***Actions to Address Economic Factors***

USG broadens the scope of market regulation to avoid major financial collapse. For example, financial derivatives and cryptocurrencies are strictly regulated. (Involved: the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.)



USG promotes legislative and regulatory measures to move American business to a highly regulated, reshoring *stakeholder* model of capitalism. This measure both reduces the risk of

### **From “Wild West” Capitalism to a More Responsible Capitalism**

<b>Laissez-Faire</b>	➔	<b>Well-Regulated</b>
<b>Offshoring</b>	➔	<b>Onshoring</b>
<b>Shareholder Capitalism</b>	➔	<b>Stakeholder Capitalism</b>

massive financial collapse and improves the real economy of the nation, in terms of production, wages, and jobs. (Involved: Departments of Commerce and Labor.)

### *Actions to Address Geopolitical Factors*

USG increases efforts to stymie the Chinese and Russian capacity to launch attacks on America. This will involve the accelerated development of advanced weapons and cyberwarfare capacity, as well as outright military and economic sabotage, perhaps accomplished much like the Stuxnet attacks on Iran’s nuclear



program. Improvements

in cyberwarfare capacity will doubtless involve the commitment of greater resources to the U.S. Cyber Command and its components, within the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

### *Actions to Address Sociocultural & Domestic Political Factors*

To address social, cultural, and domestic political factors, we must remember that we have spent generations promoting the myth of how the rugged individualist supposedly built this country.





We must shift our cultural narrative to reflect the fact that America was *really* built by *communities* of people who settled the land, built the schools and houses of worship, celebrated together,

and improved their surroundings.





Here is how we start to shift the archetypes that guide our national life:

The Executive Branch launches a four-pronged effort to promote mutual cooperation and a community-building ethic:



**Prong #1:** As Preacher-in-Chief, the President promotes the American tradition that “we are all on this wagon train together,” and promotes the community “barn-raising” ethic of mutual cooperation for the benefit of all. (Involved: the Executive Branch of USG.)



**Prong #2:** The Executive launches a massive effort in primary and secondary schools to promote the “wagon train” tradition and the “barn-raising” ethic. (Involved: Department of Education.)



**Prong #3:** USG uses social cause marketing techniques, on all media, to promote the idea that the “true American way” is to pull together in a crisis. (Involved: Department of Education.)

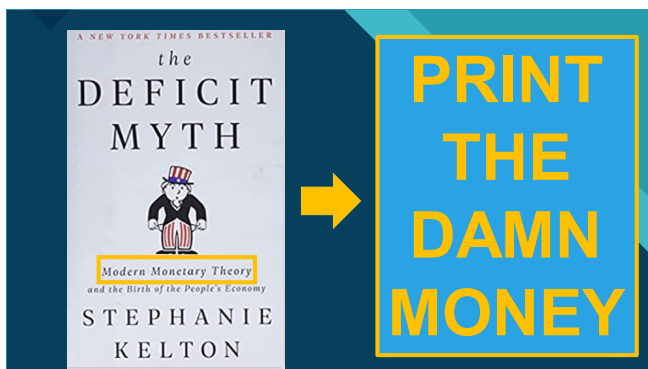
**Prong #4:** USG sponsors conferences at colleges and universities on the advantages of societal cooperation, and pulling together in a crisis. (Involved: Department of Education.)

USG also launches similar four-pronged efforts promoting the reality of the climate crisis, respect for science and its methods, critical thinking, and the hallmarks of democracy, such as the Constitution and the rule of law. (Involved: Department of Education.)

### More Four-Pronged Efforts

- **The Reality of the Climate Crisis**
- **Respect for Science and Its Methods**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **The Hallmarks of Democracy (Constitution, Rule of Law)**

### *Funding for These Actions*



To provide the monumental funding necessary for these actions, the Executive Branch adopts Modern Monetary Theory as its official policy. In other words, we just “print the damn money” to protect and support our

people. Taxes on the resulting prosperity (and fairer taxes on corporations and the extremely wealthy) pay off our debts. (Involved: the Executive Branch and the Department of the Treasury.)

Over forty years of data clearly show that “trickle down” economics did nothing for America. “Gush up” economics will do more than “trickle down” ever did.



### *The U.S. Department of Foresight*

In closing, my final recommendation is that the President and Congress establish a Cabinet-level Department of Foresight. The factors driving collapse were all foreseeable decades in advance. We must never allow America to be caught so thoroughly unprepared again.

I thank you for your kind attention.

